

Welcoming Newcomers to SA

Newcomers are welcomed into SA meetings in various ways. We do not have one right way. We trust that each group, being autonomous, will develop an orientation plan that adheres to the principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. To aid in this effort, this publication collects and organizes the experience of groups throughout the fellowship with newcomers. The purpose is to share general principles and suggested newcomer orientation formats.

Here are some suggestions that have proven helpful in welcoming newcomers to our fellowship:

Consider the newcomers' need for assurance that SA is a safe place.

According to Tradition Twelve, "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities." Coming to SA for the first time was difficult and uncomfortable for most of us. Some of us were relieved to find a safe place and were eager to share. Others were too afraid or ashamed to say much at all.

Meetings have been adapted to help newcomers feel safe and at ease in some of the following ways:

- Give newcomers brief and basic information about Twelve Step recovery and how it works.
- Share your story, including how SA has helped you.
- Listen to their story and encourage areas of identification.
- Answer their questions
- Reassure them they can find help and hope in SA if they keep coming back.
- Assure them that their sharing and personal information will be kept confidential, except that admission of specific criminal behavior might not be held in confidence due to legal mandates.

Consider their previous exposure to SA and Twelve Step principles.

Newcomers with significant experience with the Twelve Steps may already be familiar with the meeting formats and the Traditions. Others may need definitions about topics such as crosstalk, sponsorship, and anonymity. The orientation may be adapted to the needs and experiences of the newcomer.

Consider the newcomers' responsibility for their own recovery.

Some suggestions to achieve this include the following:

- Focus on what the SA program has to offer, how it works, and what it has done for you.
- Avoid pressuring them to commit to a list of actions they must take.
- Offer solutions and tools that have worked for others, including some literature, a temporary sponsor, and a meeting list with contact information.
- Invite them to attend meetings and join in the fellowship after the meeting.

Consider the newcomers' need for acceptance.

Tradition Three states, "The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober." Each of us decides for ourselves whether we qualify for membership.

The following ideas are some that others have used to assure newcomers that they, too, can belong:

- The Twenty Questions or a similar list can be useful to newcomers wondering, "Am I a sexaholic?"
- Emphasize that SA is about recovering from the disease we share in common.
- Tell them that no matter what sexual behaviors have brought them here, they are welcome in SA.
- Explain that others in SA have had similar situations and experiences.
- Offer to introduce them to several sober members with whom they might identify.
- Share tapes of SA speakers whose stories might reduce or allay any fear of not being accepted.

Consider when and where to meet with newcomers.

Tradition Four teaches us that "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or Sexaholics Anonymous as a whole." Some orientations are designed to be a special newcomer meeting at a different time and/or place from the regular meeting. Other meetings start with everyone together; then volunteers are asked to take the newcomer out of the regular meeting and have a separate newcomer meeting, returning at closing time. Still other meetings adjust the regular meeting to accommodate the needs of newcomers and continue with the combined meeting.

Consider in your own group conscience how to greet newcomers.

Consider what type of format is best for your meeting.

The following sample formats are examples of what a newcomer meeting might look like. Group conscience decisions from individual meetings may adapt any of these for their own use. Formats should be based on the principles and traditions of SA as found in *Sexaholics Anonymous* and other SA literature.

Suggested Format for a Separate Meeting for Newcomers

1. Leader reads or asks a volunteer to read all or part of "To the Newcomer" (*Sexaholics Anonymous* p. 1-3).
2. SA members briefly tell their story (4-5 min. each), describing what life was like before SA, what brought them to SA, and what life is like now.
3. Invite newcomers to share their story if they wish.
4. Explain the definition of SA sobriety, possibly adding that for many of us our acceptance of this definition has grown over time. Answer any immediate questions.
5. Explain some or all of the following:
 - a. *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Big Book)
 - b. *Sexaholics Anonymous* (White Book)
 - c. The problem is not sex, it is lust

- d. The Steps and Traditions
 - e. Sponsorship
 - f. Using the telephone
 - g. Meeting list
 - h. Higher Power/God/Spiritual Program
 - i. "A Caution" (*Sexaholics Anonymous* p. 3)
6. If the newcomers are not sure if SA is for them, encourage them to attend several meetings before deciding.
 7. Read "Conclusions" (*Sexaholics Anonymous* p. 56) and end with the Serenity Prayer.
 8. Return to main meeting about 15 minutes before the ending if the regular meeting is currently in session, or attend an upcoming meeting with newcomers.
 9. After the meeting, offer newcomers a copy of *Sexaholics Anonymous*, a meeting list, and any free literature that may suit their needs.
 10. Introduce newcomers to other members, especially those they may identify with who have solid recovery, sobriety, and may be prospective or temporary sponsors.
 11. Offer newcomers a phone list, marking your name and names of those they have just met. Encourage them to call anyone on the list, as needed, as a tool for sobriety.
 12. Invite newcomers to any available fellowship after the meeting.

Suggested Format for Modifying the Regular Meeting

When newcomers are present, adjust the regular meeting format by selecting the chapter, "To the Newcomer" (*Sexaholics Anonymous* p. 1-3), for one of the readings. Members may share on this topic and/or give mini-first steps. Newcomers are invited to share their story if they wish. The leader or another designated member makes sure newcomers are offered a temporary sponsor, *Sexaholics Anonymous* (White Book), other appropriate literature, and a meeting list. Engage them in conversation for a few minutes after the meeting to welcome them into the fellowship, answer their questions, and invite them to return.

Suggested Format for Acknowledging Newcomers in a Regular Meeting

Near the beginning of the meeting, where members introduce themselves, insert: "Are there any newcomers who would like to introduce themselves by first name only?" If there are newcomers, welcome them and ask how they learned about the meeting. After introductions, read the following: "If you are a newcomer, we suggest you attend at least six or more meetings before making a decision as to whether or not you belong in SA. Please take a copy of our meeting list and get someone's phone number before you leave tonight. Would all those who will be available to talk to newcomers after the meeting, please raise your hand? Sponsorship is an integral part of the sobriety and recovery process in SA. If there is an individual who has a quality of sobriety and recovery that you would like to have for yourself, we suggest you ask that person to be your temporary sponsor."

Continue with the regular format until the close of the meeting.

Closing statements when newcomers are present:

"Please keep the identifying information of anyone you meet or learn about here in SA to yourself. Remember that we never identify ourselves publicly with SA in the press, radio, TV, or films. Neither does anyone speak for SA. The opinions and feelings expressed here are strictly those of the person who gave them. The things

you heard here were spoken in confidence and must be treated as confidential.
Whatever your problems, there are those among us who have had them also.”

Close in the usual way.

The leader or another designated member makes sure newcomers are offered a temporary sponsor, *Sexaholics Anonymous* (White Book), other appropriate literature, a meeting list, and are engaged in conversation for a few minutes after the meeting to welcome them into the fellowship, answer their questions, and invite them to return.

Other Suggestions

If you have other suggestions for newcomer meeting formats, please forward them to SAICO. Some of these will be considered for use in future issues of *Essay*.

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